

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please CANCEL claims 13 and 14 without prejudice to or disclaimer of the recited subject matter.

Please ADD new claim 15, as follows. For the Examiner's convenience, all claims currently pending in this application have been reproduced below:

1. (Previously Presented) A near-field photomask comprising:
  - a light shield film and openings formed in said light shield film,
  - wherein the openings generate near-field light in response to receiving light incident thereon, wherein the generated near-field light is usable to expose an exposure target with the near-field light,
  - wherein the openings formed in said light shield film comprise two or more parallel rows of first slit openings each having a width smaller than 100 nm, and two or more parallel rows of second slit openings each having a width smaller than 100 nm, which extend perpendicularly to the two or more parallel rows of first slit openings, and interlinking at least two of said rows of first slit openings, comprising means for forming a plurality of discrete, spaced apart latent-dot-image formed areas, spaced apart from each other along two perpendicular directions on an exposure target in response to each of the first and second slit openings receiving polarized light having an electric field component parallel to the two or more parallel rows of first slit openings.

2. (Canceled)

3. (Previously Presented) A near-field photomask according to Claim 1, wherein the width of said second slit opening is equal to a width of said light shield film positioned between two adjacent first slit openings.

4. (Previously Presented) A near-field photomask according to Claim 3, wherein the openings formed in said light shield film are configured and positioned to generate near-field light in a square dot pattern on an exposed area of the exposure target.

5. (Previously Presented) A near-field photomask according to Claim 1, wherein a plurality of the two or more parallel rows of second slit openings are arranged at a predetermined interval.

6. (Previously Presented) A near-field exposure apparatus comprising:

- a near-field photomask according to Claim 1;
- light illuminating means for illuminating said near-field photomask with polarized light, which has an electric field component parallel to said rows of first slit openings; and
- means for positioning said near-field photomask at a distance from the exposure target within a near-field region thereof.

7-14. (Canceled)

15. (New) A near-field photomask for forming a latent image on an exposure target by generated near-field light by receiving exposure light, said photomask comprising:

a light shield film and openings formed in the light shield film, wherein the openings comprise first slit openings having two or more slit openings lengthening in a first direction and a second slit opening lengthening in a second direction, wherein the second slit opening interlinks the first slit openings, wherein the latent image is locally formed on the exposure target in a region of the second slit opening, which is surrounded by the first slit openings by receiving polarized light having an electric field component parallel to the first direction.